

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly

VOLUME VII No. 1 WINTER 1977



Israel Smith

Israel Smith (1759-1810)

Governor 1807-1808

COMMEMORATING THE ELEVEN RUTLAND MEN
WHO GOVERNED THE STATE OF VERMONT

The Society publishes the *Quarterly* for its members in the interests of preserving and studying the history of the Rutland community which comprises the towns of West Rutland, Proctor, Rutland and the City of Rutland. The Society maintains and operates a museum and resource center at 101 Center Street, Rutland, in the former Bank of Rutland building (1825), now owned by the City of Rutland.

* * * * *

Membership in the Society is open to all upon payment of annual dues which are: Regular—\$2.00; Contributing—\$10.00; Life (one payment)—\$75.00. Gifts of money or articles of historic interest are welcome at all times and are deductible for tax purposes since the Society is a certified non-profit corporation chartered by the State of Vermont.

* * * * *

Coming Events

House tour of historical and interesting exteriors and interiors of buildings in the Rutland area on Saturday, June 18, 1977, from ten to four. Price of admission will be \$3.00, for the benefit of the Society.

* * * * *

In this year, which marks the 200th anniversary of the formation of Vermont, first as a Republic for fourteen years, and then as a State in the Federal Union, we memorialize the men who, while serving as governor of the State of Vermont resided within the boundaries of the original town of Rutland as chartered by Benning Wentworth in 1761. No other town in the state can equal the number Rutland has sent, eleven. Bennington with, at most, eight is second. Some of our governors were giants; all were capable men who served the state well.

* * * * *

The Cover

Israel Smith, a native of Suffield, Connecticut, was the first resident of Rutland to serve as chief executive. He was unique, a giant. At a time when the state was in sympathy with the Federalist party Smith, a Jeffersonian Republican, was an office holder for a quarter of a century.

Like most men of his day who held high public office he was well educated (Yale 1781) and was a lawyer. He was one of two men elected in 1791 to represent the newly admitted state of Vermont in Congress. He served several terms, being beaten on his last attempt by one of his own party, the indomitable Matthew Lyons. He sat in the United States Senate, having overcome the staunch Federalist, Nathaniel Chipman. Interspersed with his years in the Nation's capital he served as Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court. As the fortunes of the Jeffersonians rose in 1807 he was elected to a one-year term as governor. His biographer, Charles L. Williams, notes that he was seriously considered by Thomas Jefferson for the post of Attorney-General in his cabinet. In his later years he suffered severe financial losses and his health declined. His home, considerably modified, still stands at the corner of North Main Street and Aiken Place.



Charles Kilborn Williams (1782-1853)
Governor 1850-1852



John Boardman Page (1826-1885)
Governor 1867-1869

Another giant was Charles K. Williams, son of a distinguished father, the Rev. Samuel Williams. Governor Williams graduated from Williams College and studied law under Cephas Smith, Jr. His service to the state was long and honorable; member of the General Assembly for seven years; collector of customs for four years; President of the Council of Censors (fore-runner of the state senate); and a member of the highest court of the state for nineteen years. In this age of specialization, a judicial career is virtually a kiss of death to anyone who aspires to the governorship, but in his day Williams capped his career by serving two years as chief executive. The only judge in recent memory who later became governor was Deane C. Davis.

Next in line from Rutland was John Page who came from a noteworthy family (his grandfather built the first canal in North America at Bellows Falls and his father was chief executive of the Bank of Rutland in the very same building that now houses the Society). Page was the first of a long line of successful industrialists and financiers who became governor. He also is the only Rutland governor who did not receive a college education. At seventeen he worked in his father's bank, in time he took over his father's job; later he reorganized the Howe Scale Company and moved it from Brandon to Rutland. He was active in several railroads, served as treasurer of the state during the Civil War, installing his offices in the present Lawrence Recreation Center. Though adept at handling other people's money, he died penniless, leaving his widow only the family mansion which she ran as a rooming house, known later as "Sycamore Inn".



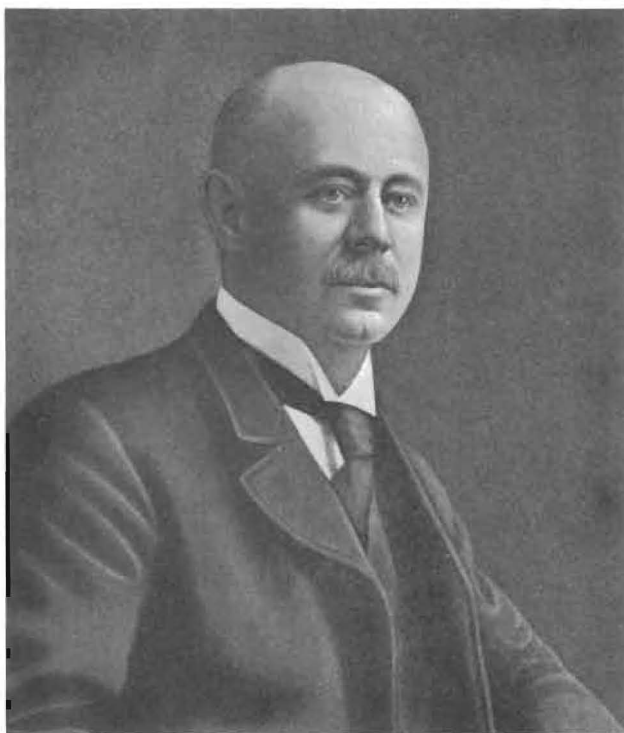
Redfield Proctor (1831-1908)
Governor 1878-1880

Colonel Redfield Proctor was the last of the true giants to serve as governor. His family gave its name to a village in his native Cavendish just as he was later to bestow his name on the little marble mill town of Sutherland Falls. His formal education was at Dartmouth (1851) and he was for a time a practicing member of the bar in partnership with Wheelock G. Veazey who, like Proctor, was a Civil War veteran. He demonstrated his business acumen by combining many small competing marble mills into one efficient near-monopoly, the Vermont Marble Company. He entered politics at the bottom of the ladder, serving as town selectman, town representative, county senator and governor. His later service in the United States Senate and as Secretary of War under Benjamin Harrison, and his report on the conduct of the Spanish-American war brought him national renown. He was a man of many interests ranging from a paternal concern for his workers, to research on, and publication of, the minute book of the early Vermont Conventions kept by Jonas Fay. The power he accumulated over the years advanced many lesser men into the governor's office, and this power enabled separate town charters in 1886 to be granted to West Rutland and Proctor.

***** *

A Notice . . .

The Publications Committee of the Society, headed by James S. Davidson, will publish early this summer a pictorial book of the Rutland communities. The book will run about 160 pages, will be richly illustrated; the editor is Robert E. West. Advance subscriptions are solicited at a special pre-publication price of \$6.00 per copy. Reservations for one or more copies may be secured by mailing a check to the Society's treasurer, George J. Covalt, R.F.D., West Rutland, Vt.



Fletcher Dutton Proctor (1860-1911)
Governor 1906-1908

Fletcher Proctor, the elder son of the Colonel, was educated as a gentleman at Amherst, served an apprenticeship in the company mills and became president in 1889 at the age of twenty-nine. With the company running smoothly, young Proctor was free to follow his father's steps up the political ladder, although his career was not as broad nor as long. After serving as Speaker of the House in 1900 he felt he should secure the Republican nomination for governor. The same thought occurred to the three railroad magnates, Dr. W. Seward Webb, John G. McCullough and Percival Clement. Webb withdrew early in the race. Clement, owner of the Rutland *Herald* and one-time operator of the Rutland Railroad, ran on a platform for repeal of the state prohibition law. McCullough shrewdly hedged on the issue and, amid charges of vote buying, secured the Republican nomination after Proctor dramatically withdrew in favor of McCullough. Although Clement failed of election he had the satisfaction of seeing a local-option law enacted during the early days of McCullough's administration. Clement and Proctor sought the nomination in 1906 and Proctor won handily. Clement's time had not yet come.

* * * * *

. . . and a plea

The editor of the Rutland pictorial book wishes to use the best available pictures. The loan of photographs, motion picture film, postcards, prints, oil paintings, water colors or maps of the City of Rutland, and the towns of West Rutland, Proctor and Rutland will be most welcome. Please write or phone the editor, Robert E. West, 26 Williams Street, Rutland (phone: 773-3909).



John Abner Mead (1841–1920)
Governor 1910–1912



Percival Wood Clement (1846–1927)
Governor 1919–1921

It was the custom of the Republicans to alternate their candidates for the governorship from the east side of the mountains to the west side. After Fletcher Proctor had served his two-year term the opportunity for the west side did not return until 1910, when John Mead, a medical doctor-turned-industrialist, sought and won the office. Mead was descended from one of the early settlers of the area, was educated at Middlebury College and the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York. He practiced his profession for a time but found his true calling in the world of business. For many years an active officer of the Rutland Railroad, he reorganized the Howe Scale Company and became its president. After the disastrous Bates House fire he built the Mead Building. In 1893 he was elected the first mayor of the City of Rutland and also served in minor political offices.

Meanwhile, Clement had been busy with his banking interests and had been building his political strength to win the office he had twice unsuccessfully sought. The occasion finally came in 1918 when he was elected as an anti-Proctor candidate. His forays into politics were frequent but he concentrated his efforts on the higher posts. He served two terms as mayor of the City, from 1897 to 1898 and from 1911 to 1912. A detailed but confusing account of the famous four-way race of 1902 was written by Mason A. Green, *Nineteen-two in Vermont; the fight for local option*, published in 1912.

* * * * *

Credits

Charlotte Smith Nicolet, for permission to use photograph of Gov. Smith.
Rutland *Herald*, for permission to use photographs of Gov. M. Proctor and Gov. Stafford.
Vermont Historical Society, for permission to use photograph of oil painting of Gov. Williams.



*Redfield Proctor, Jr. (1879-1957)
Governor 1923-1925*



*Charles Manley Smith (1868-1937)
Governor 1935-1937*

Redfield Proctor, Jr., also a son of the Colonel, was nineteen years younger than his brother Fletcher. A graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he was foremost a practical engineer, not a financier. By the younger Redfield's time the growth of the marble industry had stabilized and the company was run smoothly by men such as Frank C. Partridge. Redfield, like his father and brother before him, entered politics and moved steadily toward the top. His term as governor was, as Robert Mitchell points out, as conservative as that of his father some fifty years before. Redfield's presidency of the marble company overlapped the years of World War II. His skill as an engineer made the conversion of the company's plants to war production smooth and efficient. The Proctor company undoubtedly had its Rosy the Riveters but it also could boast of its "Mica Maids," the women who sliced books of mica into precise pieces for electronic equipment.

Charles Smith grew up in a big house in West Rutland located at the spot still referred to as "Smith's Corners". He moved to Rutland, buying the old Davis place on Park Street now used by V.A.C. He received a good north country education (Dartmouth '91) and is the only governor known to have earned a Phi Beta Kappa key. He operated a brickyard and a feed store and several farms. During his presidency of the Marble Savings Bank he built the sumptuous Renaissance-Revival structure the bank still occupies at West and Merchants Row. During the Bank Holidays of the depression he showed his independence by cooperating with the State Banking Department to conceal the shaky status of the bank due to the peculations of an employee. The bank stayed open. As governor he did many things that broke with Vermont tradition, but which had to be done; for example he started an old-age assistance program with state funds prior to the Federal Social Security program.



Mortimer Robinson Proctor (1889-1968)
Governor 1945-1947



Robert T. Stafford (1913-)
Governor 1959-1961

Mortimer Proctor was the last, but not necessarily the least of the Proctor governors. Like his father, Fletcher, he received a genteel education (Yale) and assumed the presidency of the marble company at a time when marble was suffering from competition from other building materials.

Robert Stafford is the only Rutland governor still living and was the first lawyer since Colonel Redfield Proctor. He graduated from Middlebury and his political career initially was largely confined to those offices open only to lawyers - grand juror, State's Attorney, etc. His service in the Navy gave him a feel for trimming his sails as the winds of public opinion shifted.

A Notice . . .

* * * * *

Sources

Robert Gunshannon. 75 pages of typed material about Israel Smith deposited with Vermont Historical Society

Robert W. Mitchell. *State's Governors Reflect an Eventful Half-Century.*, Rutland Sunday Herald, Jan. 2, 1977

——— *The Proctor Family . . .*, Rutland Daily Herald, Oct. 7, 1976

Charles L. Williams. *Statistics of the Rutland County Bar.* Brandon, 1847

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
101 CENTER STREET
RUTLAND, VERMONT 05701

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
Rutland, Vermont
Permit No. 12